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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003231

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: FUGITIVE COUNTY MAGISTRATE STILL MISSING

Classified By: AIT Deputy Director David J. Keegan, Reasons: 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: Yunlin County Magistrate Chang Jung-Wei disappeared on August 14, shortly after questions were raised about his involvement in a local bribery scandal. He was later declared a fugitive after ignoring repeated summonses from prosecutors. Chang claims he is the victim of a vendetta by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government over his support for the opposition during the 2004 presidential election. Most observers dismiss Chang's claims of political persecution, noting his past brushes with the law. Chang's disappearance will likely be a major issue in the upcoming legislative election campaign in Yunlin, which will pit Chang's sister against his secretary and the county councilwoman who exposed the scandal. The Chang affair is typical of the sort of specific local issues that may determine the results of the December election. End Summary.

From Magistrate to Fugitive

2. (U) Yunlin County, a rural politically divided district on the west coast of south central Taiwan, has a well-earned reputation for corruption, money politics and organized crime. KMT County Magistrate Chang Jung-Wei is no exception. On August 13, as part of an investigation into a bribery scandal involving the construction of an incinerator in Linnei township, Yunlin prosecutors raided both the office and residence of the Magistrate. On August 16, he was summoned by prosecutors for questioning, but failed to appear. After he ignored additional summonses, a warrant for his arrest was issued on August 23 and he was officially declared a fugitive. On August 26, Taiwan's High Court upheld a separate conviction against Chang for vote-buying in his 1994 election for County Council Speaker, sentencing him to 12 months of imprisonment. To date his whereabouts are still unknown, although Chang has given several private interviews to local newspapers over the past two months to dispel rumors that he has fled to China.

3. (U) The investigation began in June, when Yunlin prosecutors received an anonymous tip from a local resident that Yunlin government officials, including Chang, had accepted a large bribe to approve construction on the Linnei Incinerator. Eight contractors and government officials, including Linnei Mayor Chen Ho-Shan were brought in for questioning. Chen admitted in July that he had accepted NT\$18 million (\$530,000) in "commissions" from construction companies to ensure that contracts would be awarded to them. Bank records, however, indicated that over NT\$90 million (\$2.7 million) was missing from funds meant to purchase land for the incinerator, leading the prosecutors to look at other possible suspects, including Magistrate Chang.

Chang: Corrupt Polluter?

4. (U) The incinerator project has been a flash point of controversy ever since Chang proposed it in November 2000. Local residents, led by DPP Legislative Yuan (LY) Member Su Chi-Fen and Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) County Councilwoman Yin Ling-Ying, opposed its location just 1.8 km from an open-air water treatment facility on public health grounds. Yin made repeated attempts over the years to bring the incinerator case to court, citing financial irregularities and suspicious business practices in the plans for construction and operation of the plant. The incinerator issue is the latest incident in a long-running battle between Yin and Chang. In 1999, Yin called in support from the international environmental community to fight a land-excavation project initiated by Chang that would have destroyed the natural habitat of the endangered fairy pitta bird. (Note: Yin is running in the December LY election. The DPP's Su is not running for re-election this year, but is expected to run for County Magistrate next year. End Note.)

Or Victim of Political Persecution

5. (U) Chang has denied all charges and claims to be the victim of political persecution. In newspaper interviews, he has said the investigation is being used by the present administration to punish him for his outspoken campaigning on

behalf of the Pan-Blue Lien-Soong ticket during the March presidential election. He claims to have gone into hiding because he fears he will be imprisoned for political reasons before he can have his day in court. His sister, Chang Li-Shan, held a press conference shortly after his disappearance to allege that Tsai Chi-Wen, the prosecutor in charge of the case, had close ties to DPP Legislator Su. Other allies of Chang on the County Council have attempted to discredit the investigation by suggesting that the relationship between Tsai and Su may be "intimate." (Note: Chang Li-Shan is running in the coming LY elections. Because she failed to secure the KMT nomination, she will run as an independent. End Note.)

16. (C) Lee Chien-Chung, a local lawyer and brother of TSU County Councilman Lee Chien-Hsing, said Chang's claims of political persecution were meant to distract attention from his criminal activities. Newspapers report that Chang's accusers (Tsai, Su, and Yin) have all received death threats from Chang, who has never made a secret of his underworld connections and gangster past. DPP officials involved with the 2004 presidential election are even more dismissive of Chang's persecution claims. They say that Chang's reported decision to pocket KMT money before the March 20 election rather than distribute it on behalf of the Lien-Soong campaign was a major factor in Chen Shui-bian's landslide victory in Yunlin.

Comment: Politics as usual in Yunlin County

17. (C) While Yunlin's reputation for corruption and money politics is perhaps the worst on the island, the prominence of the Chang affair in the ongoing election campaign is indicative of the local, sometimes sordid nature of LY campaign politics. In Yunlin, as in many areas of Taiwan, personalities and local power politics matter more than party label and policy stands. Septel will further examine the role these factors will play in the upcoming LY election.

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